

U.S. Army Engineer Museum

Fort Leonard Wood, MO

THE DE FLEURY MEDAL



As the Corps of Engineers implemented the US Army Regimental System, the senior engineer leadership sought a method for the Corps of Engineers to honor those individuals who have provided significant contributions to Army Engineering.

The Army Regimental System was developed to emphasize the history, customs, and traditions of the Corps; so MG Daniel R. Schroeder, then Commanding General of Fort Leonard Wood and Engineer School Commandant, wanted an award that would tie in with the beginnings of the nation and the Army Corps of Engineers.

In 1777, a French Engineer volunteered to serve with the American Army in its fight for independence from Britain. Francois Louis Tesseidre de Fleury was born in St. Hippolyte, France in 1749; was trained as an engineer; and served in the French Army during the Corsican Campaign.

The Continental Congress appointed de Fleury a captain of engineers, and he quickly proved himself. Wounded at the battles of Fort Mifflin and Brandywine (where his horse was shot out from under him), he soon became Lt. Col. de Fleury.

But it was in the desperate battle at Stony Point, New York in 1779, that de Fleury's courage, under fire, won him the accolades of Congress.

In June of 1779, two small American forts were being established on the Hudson River at Stony Point and Verplanck's Point, about 30 miles from Manhattan Island. A large British force easily captured both sites. The enemy began building a strong defensive perimeter around Stony Point. The Point was actually a peninsula jutting nearly half a mile into the Hudson, tipped with rocky crags which shot up 150 feet above the river. On the landward side was swamp which flooded at high tide, sinking a causeway running to the shore under two feet of water and making the Point an island.

The formidable defense included several batteries partially connected by trenches, log and earth redoubts around the main fort, and a double abatis. It was called "Little Gibraltar".

GEN George Washington was disturbed by the capture of the two forts. British occupation gave them control of a vital segment of the river and rerouted American communications, supplies, and troops moving between New England and the other colonies. Worse, GEN Washington was convinced the enemy was preparing to strike West Point, less than 15 miles upriver.

American reinforcements were quickly moved into position north of Stony Point, but Washington thought there was no hope of recapture. A recently formed light infantry corps led by the daring Brigadier General "Mad" Anthony Wayne, consisted of hand picked combat veterans. The group was made up of four regiments of about 340 men each. COL Christian "Old Denmark" Febiger headed the 1st Regiment with de Fleury as second in command.

On July 15th, the corps, except for a small diversionary force, unloaded weapons and turned in their ammunition. Secrecy was so tight the troops did not know they were going to attempt to recapture Stony Point. For such a risky assault, surprise was vital; and the attack was to take place in total darkness. Fixed bayonets and hand-to-hand combat were the orders of the day. Wayne's column had no sooner sloshed into the waist-deep water before a British picket sent up an alarm. During the fierce fighting, Wayne and Febiger both suffered stunning head wounds.

The Continentals scrambled up the rocky slope with de Fleury in the lead. First over the wall, de Fleury was followed by a wave of American bayonets. Rushing to the flag pole, de Fleury cut the British colors from their staff.

In addition to the recapture of Stony Point, the defeat of the British fired the American's determination and lifted their morale. It showed the enemy that the colonies had an able fighting force.

So it was that on 1 October 1779, de Fleury stood before the Continental Congress to be praised for his valor at Stony Point by the men who had penned the Declaration of Independence and would later sign the Constitution. For his intrepid behavior, the Continental Congress awarded a medal struck in his honor.

The Engineer Regiment adopted the de Fleury Medal as an award because of the values demonstrated by the man for whom it was struck - values of special meaning to Engineer Soldiers. It is understood that the de Fleury Medal was the first Congressional Medal struck, if not the first medal authorized.

On the obverse of the medal is the Latin inscription meaning: "A MEMORIAL AND REWARD FOR COURAGE AND BOLDNESS". In the center appears the image of a helmeted soldier standing amidst the ruins of a fort, holding in his right hand an unsheathed sword, and in his left the staff of the enemy's flag, which he tramples underfoot.

On the reverse, again in Latin: "FORTIFICATIONS, MARSHES, ENEMIES OVERCOME". In the center the fortress at Stony Point is depicted with both turrets and a flag flying. At the base of the hill are two shore batteries, one of which is firing at one of six vessels on the Hudson River- Beneath the fort is the legend: "STONY POINT CARRIED BY STORM, JULY 15, 1779".

Presentation of the de Fleury Medal, to those individuals meeting established criteria, was begun in 1989. Soldiers and civilians, active and retired, from enlisted soldiers to Generals to the Chief of Staff of the French Army proudly wear the de Fleury Medal. The de Fleury award program is administered by the Army Engineer Association for the US Army Corps of Engineers. The medal dies are controlled by the United States Mint which is responsible for striking the medals.

Contact (573) 329-6678 for further information.